

Dear Joint Sub-committee members:

My name is Connie Sturgis I currently own and Direct Small World childcare & Preschool in Sidney, MT. I would like to give you a little background information on my center. I employ 10 caregivers and 3 supportive staff. One of my caregivers is one semester away from a BA in Early Childhood with a minor in special needs. Two of my staff personal has AA degrees in early Childhood. I have four of my staff starting Infant Toddler training and are going on to get their Child Development Assessment (CDA) Certificates. I have one childcare giver that has been with me for 11 years another person has been with me for 9 yrs barely making over minimum wages now. Small world does not just offer childcare; we provide a learning environment for children and families. They are our future.

At Small World we do not discriminate from taking state assisted children or foster children. As a provider I accept the rate the state given to me for payment. I do not charge over their co-payment set by the state and at this time the state rate is lower than my non- state pay families. 65% of my children are currently on state assistance, out of my fifty spots.

Richland County serves 56 families on childcare assistance and 31 of these children attend

Small World.

The second issue is minimum wage rising twice in one year and with raising wages usually come higher food costs, electric bills, and etc. I am barely making ends meet now. It would be hard for my center to remain open or to retain the high quality staff that I feel our children deserve. Most of my staff can go work else where, for a higher wages with benefits, which this makes it even harder for me to retain quality staff.

So you can see how not raising the current market rate to coincide with the rising of minimum wage how that would affect me.

When I interview a person for the position of a caregiver the cost to hire this person is around \$500 because of having to get background checks, shots, and required trainings to start the job. If current rates are not raise it will be hard to compete in the job market for employees because it wages it is a shame when a person with a bachelors degree can go work at McDonald's and get higher wages and benefits.

If the current market rates our not raised, most providers will be force to only take private paid children or to seek different jobs and close their doors. Parents will be forced to have family members or a next door neighbor they only meet a few days earlier to watch their children or quit their jobs and go on welfare. How will this save our state any

money? People who have jobs need quality child care. I'm asking is this what we want to do for our youngest members of our state.

I am asking you, to please consider raising the market rate for Child care providers, across the state and for the future of our Children.

Connie Sturgis